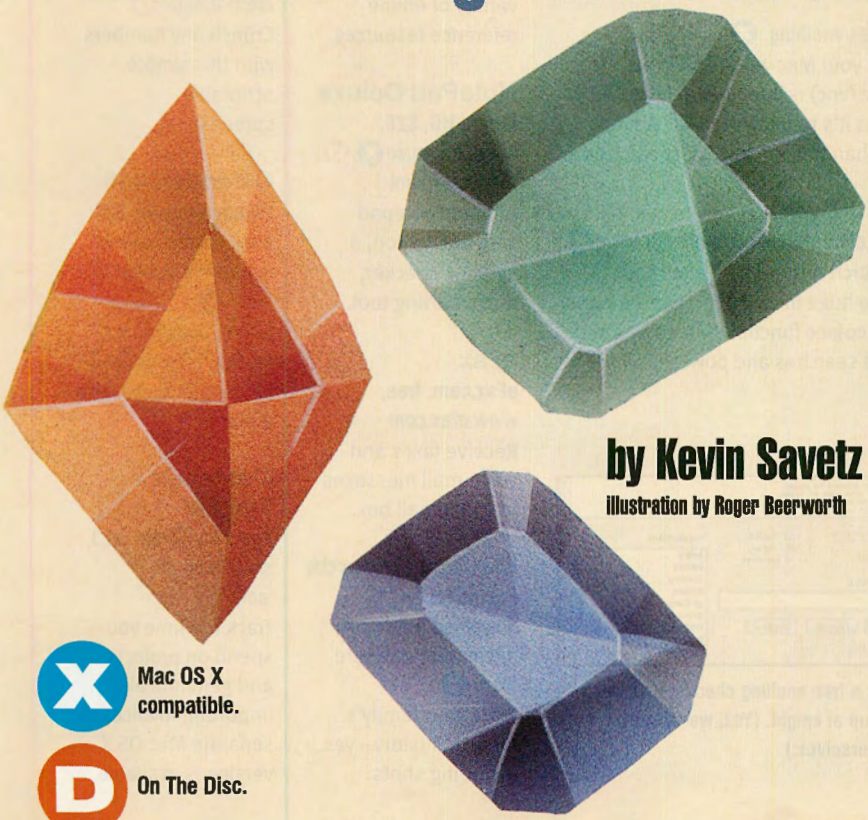
150 Shareware Gems

The best things in life are free—or close to it.



by Kevin Savetz

illustration by Roger Beerworth

Mac OS X compatible.

On The Disc.

You don't have to spend big bucks for great software. Hundreds of dedicated Mac developers have lovingly crafted a veritable treasure trove of shareware and freeware gems—some as finely faceted and perfectly polished as any commercial app. The difference? Shareware and freeware come cheap—and you get that warm fuzzy feeling knowing that you're helping someone pay their rent rather than boosting the value of some megacorporation's stock.

We rounded up 150 of the top shareware and freeware applications in the Mac universe. If an app cost more than $100 or came in a box, we excluded it. (Hey, we had to draw the line somewhere.) We then grouped our favorites into a dozen categories and divided each category into two parts: "Must-Have" (apps that belong on every hard drive), and "Worth a Try" (other great software you should at least take for a spin).

One last thing: Freeware, as its name implies, doesn't cost a dime, but shareware is another story. These apps represent the blood, sweat, and tears of unselfish, passionate Mac fanatics—if you use their software, pay the fee. Otherwise, may the ghost of the Sad Mac haunt your dreams.

Productivity

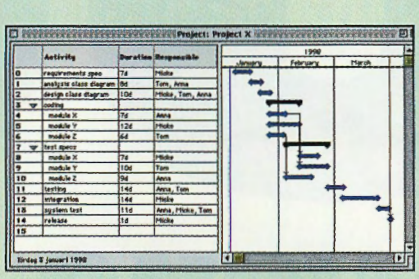
You don't have to rely on Microsoft Office to get your work done.

Must-Have

Free Nisus Writer Nisus Software, free, www.nisus.com/products/nisuswriter/free
Free Nisus Writer—no, that's not a leftist bumper sticker, it's the name of the freebie little brother of the commercial Nisus Writer 6, a full-featured word processor that includes powerful macros, tables, unlimited undos, and even basic desktop-publishing tools. If you only need the basics, download Free Nisus Compact, a 1.1MB streamlined version of the product.

StickyBrain Chronos, $59.99 or $64.95 (depending on different bundles and options), www.chronosnet.com
StickyBrain puts your pad of Post-Its to shame and thoroughly humiliates the Mac OS's Stickies. These desktop notes can include text, URLs, graphics, sounds, or any other type of information. Features include to-do lists, contacts, alarms, encryption, and a password-management feature.

ProjectPlanner Midius, $35, www.arctaedius.com/ProjectPlanner
ProjectPlanner creates schedules for complex projects. It builds easy-to-read Gantt charts (timelines that can span days, months, or years) to help keep your project on track. If you need to manage a group of folks who are contributing to the same project, just save your schedule in HTML and post it to a Web site.



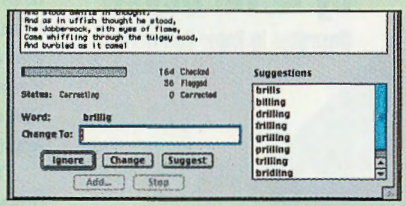
Miss deadlines in style with ProjectPlanner.

Adobe Acrobat Reader Adobe Systems, free, www.adobe.com/products/acrobat/readstep.html
If there's one piece of software that's as essential to your workday as a browser, it's Adobe Acrobat Reader. PDF files are nearly as ubiquitous as email, and Acrobat Reader is the de facto standard for viewing them. If you're going to print large PDF files in Mac OS 9.x, however, make sure you give Acrobat Reader enough memory to work with.

VNCThing Purple Shark Software, free, www.webthing.net/vncthing
Control another computer—Mac, Windows, or Unix—from your Mac with this Virtual Network Computing client. VNC (www.uk.research.att.com/vnc) is a remote display system that allows you to access any computer (as long as it's running the VNC server) over a LAN or the Internet. Free VNCThing is more stable than the official VNC client, and it works with Mac OS X.

BBEdit Lite Bare Bones Software, free, www.barebones.com/products/bbedit_lite.html
BBEdit Lite is a powerful text editor that boasts potent search-and-replace tools and multiple clipboards and also has the ability to manipulate huge files. BBEdit Lite's manual devotes 35 pages to the program's powerful search-and-replace functions—read this stuff, it's worth your time—which include both simple wild-card searches and powerful Unix-style regular-expression searches.

Excalibur Rick Zaccone and Robert Gottshall, free, www.eg.bucknell.edu/~excalibr/excalibur.html
A freeware spelling checker, Excalibur can check text files, the clipboard's contents, and documents formatted with the Latex typesetting language. It also works with BBEdit, MT-Newswatcher, and many other programs. You get a 160,000-word English dictionary, and you can download many technical and foreign-language dictionaries free from the Web site.



Excalibur: a free spelling checker that won't keep you up at knight. (Yes, we already slapped ourselves.)

Worth a Try

Budget
Ron Hooper, free, http://budgetsupport.home.att.net
Print checks, balance your checkbook, and monitor your budget.

PowerTicker
Galleon Software, $29.95, www.galleon.com/powerticker
Display the latest stock market info on a scrolling ticker.

InfoManager
MacEase, $49.95, download from www.kagi.com/macease
Clip info from any application and arrange it in tidy notes.

MacDICT
Navdeep Bains, free, www.bainsware.com/macdict
Look up words from a variety of online reference resources.

NotePad Deluxe
Ibrium HB, $25, www.ibrium.se/npdmain.html
A handy notepad with encryption, a spelling checker, and a sorting tool.

eFax
eFax.com, free, www.efax.com
Receive faxes and voice-mail messages in your email box.

Medical Records
Pacific Cargo, $5, download from www.filemakershareware.com
Track your family's medical history—yes, including shots.

icWord
Panergy, $19.95, www.icword.com
View and print Microsoft Word files—without Word.

PeopleBook
Amar Sagoo, $20, http://homepage.mac.com/asagoo/peoplebook
This cool address book can print address labels and dial your phone.

WhizGraph
DeepGreen Solutions, $45, www.deepgreen.de
This data-analysis and graphing software is powerful enough for science and easy enough for business.

Sum-It
Hekkelman Programmatuur, $20, www.hekkelman.com/sum-it.html
Crunch any numbers with this simple, scriptable spreadsheet.

Calendar2000
WünderMoösen, $25, www.wundermoosen.com/wmCalendar2000.htm
Julian, Gregorian, Jewish, Islamic, and lunar calendars—plus a planner.

Customer Tracker
Kevin VanStrien, $23, www.solarsite.com/kvs
Track the time you spend on projects and generate all-important invoices. A separate Mac OS X version is available.

Graphics

Don't want to dig deep into your wallet for Adobe Photoshop or Macromedia FreeHand? Read on.

Must-Have

GraphicConverter Lemke Software, $35, www.graphicconverter.net

An amazingly versatile graphics tool, GraphicConverter can open and edit 145 types of graphics files, including the most obscure formats. Its batch-conversion tools let you convert and tweak a hard drive full of images in one fell swoop—for example, crop and sharpen 1,000 images, then reduce each to thumbnail size and save them all in PNG format.

Print2PDF James W. Walker, $20, www.jwwalker.com/pages/pdf.html

While Print2PDF doesn't offer every function of Adobe Acrobat (you can't embed fonts or password-protect your documents), it does allow you to create PDF files without investing hundreds of dollars. Take a moment to explore Print2PDF's preferences screen, which offers many options you might otherwise miss, such as the ability to add watermarks to PDF files.

Plug-ins from Flaming Pear Flaming Pear Software, $15 to $30 per plug-in, $40 to $49 for bundles, www.flamingpear.com

We can't pick just one—each Photoshop plug-in from Flaming Pear is cooler than the last. Design a planet with LunarCell or create splashy water effects with Flood. The Ornament plug-in offers an unusual (and cheap!) way to create panoramic pictures. Coolness factor? Off the charts.

You can do terraforming on a budget with Flaming Pear's LunarCell.

CorelDraw 8 Limited Edition Corel, free, www.corel.com/draw8mac_le/product_info.htm

A light version of CorelDraw 8, this package includes both CorelDraw LE (for vector illustration and page layout) and Corel Photo-Paint LE (for image editing and painting). This app is more than powerful enough for those of us who don't get paid to work with graphics.

AppliMac Slide Show OneApp Software, $25, www.applimac.com/ss

This slide-show and presentation tool organizes multimedia files, QuickTime movies, sounds, and images, and supports a wide variety of image and audio formats, including QuickTime and MP3. You can even save presentations as stand-alone applications—for example, you can distribute that business presentation on a self-running CD-ROM.

Honor J-Lo with AppliMac Slide Show. Why? Um, we're not sure.

Worth a Try

Snapz Pro Ambrosia Software, $40, www.ambrosiasw.com/utilities/snapzpro

If you need to take screenshots, Snapz Pro is the bomb.

PhotoGIF BoxTop Software, $69.95, www.boxtopsoft.com/photogif.html

Create tiny, high-quality GIF files with this Photoshop plug-in.

ProJPEG BoxTop Software, $49.95, www.boxtopsoft.com/projpeg.html

What PhotoGIF does for GIFs, ProJPEG does for JPEGs.

JPEGView Aaron Giles, free, download from www.mac.org/graphics/jpegview

Serves up images in JPEG, PICT, GIF, and other common file formats.

Painting Sarwat Khan, $20, http://sarwat.net/painting

A simple, powerful image editor with tablet support and easy color management.

Cameraid Juri Munkki, $15, www.cameraid.com

Transfer photos from your camera, then view, rotate, and name them.

Icon Machine Uncommonplace, $25, http://uncommonplace.com/shareware/iconmachine.html

Create 16-by-12-pixel miniatures or huge 128-pixel Mac OS X icons.

PixelToy LairWare Software, $15, www.lairware.com/pixeltoy

Watch hypnotic patterns pulse to the beat of your favorite CD.

PixelToy adds a new level to your Grateful Dead CDs (as if you need it).

Rainbow Painter Norbyte, $25, www.rainbowpainter.com

This image editor includes layers, channels, and filter effects.

Warning: Rainbow Painter's colorful scrollbars may cause blindness.

Kids Animation Maker Voget Selbach Enterprises, $18, www.vse-online.com/kids-animation-maker

Easy-to-use graphics program lets kids create simple animations.

ImageViewer PlatoGrande Software, $30, www.imageviewer.com

Use batch-processing tools to rotate, rename, and scale digital images.

ImageBuddy KepMad Systems, $15, www.kepmad.com

Rotate, crop, mask, and lay out your photos for printing.

Stop wasting expensive glossy paper—use ImageBuddy first.

Mike's Edge Mike Sedore, $10, $79 for the Pro version, www.mikesedore.com/mikeedge.html

Create image masks for the Web or in PostScript.

Ptah Thoth Software, $15, www.thothsw.com/utilities/index.html

Text, images, movies, and sound files—this program opens and plays them all.

HexaSuper2 Shusaku, $54, www.shusaku.co.jp/hexa

Make 3D objects from 2D illustrations and photographs.

Utilities

Your Mac's a powerful beast—bend it to your will with one of these gems.

Must-Have

Extension Overload

Teng Chou Ming and Peter Hardman, $20, www.extensionoverload.com

Not only can you manage extensions, control panels, Control Strip modules, and contextual menus with Extension Overload, but you also get detailed descriptions on each doodad's purpose. Font-management tools also allow you to install, remove, and preview fonts. Too bad Mac OS X doesn't have an equivalent Library Overload app—yet.

A Better Finder

Frank Reiff Shareware, $9.95 to $14.95 each or $44.95 for all four, www.publicspace.net/ABetterFinderSeries

The well-named suite of tools, A Better Finder, improves how you work with files in the Mac OS's Finder. Select adds criteria-based file searching that's more powerful than Sherlock's. For example, you can find files using wild cards or Unix-style regular expressions, such as *find all files with 10-character names that include two Qs in a row.* Rename makes it easy to—guess what?—rename many files at once, and other tools let you display and change file attributes, creator apps, and types.

Version Master

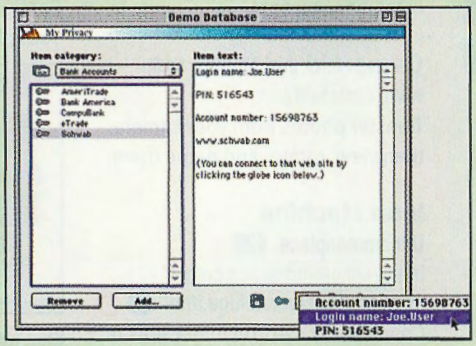
Symmetry Software, free, www.versionmaster.com

Version Master lets you know when upgrades are available for all of your software. Unlike the Software Updates control panel that came with your Mac, which is limited to Apple-approved applications, Version Master will report on the vast majority of Mac software. A $19.95 subscription adds version notes, hot links to software updaters, and other nifty features.

VSE My Privacy

Voget Selbach Enterprises, $19.95, www.vse-online.com/my-privacy

My Privacy is an encrypted information manager for passwords, bank-account information, credit-card numbers, software serial numbers, and other personal data. Copy online passwords to the clipboard with a click, and you'll never have to type (or remember) a password again.



Never lose track of a password again.

DiskTracker

Portents, $30, www.disktracker.com

DiskTracker catalogs your CD-ROMs, Zips, and floppies, and can find files anywhere, even on a disk you no longer have mounted on your Mac. Not only does it help with your hard-drive housekeeping, but it also prints custom disk labels. You've just run out of excuses for lost documents.

TechTool Lite

Micromat, free, www.micromat.com

TechTool Lite is a necessity for basic troubleshooting. This essentials-only version of Micromat's beefier TechTool Pro can zap your Mac's PRAM, delete and rebuild desktop files, and analyze your file system for hidden damage.

StuffIt Expander

Aladdin Systems, free, www.aladdinsys.com/expander

There are must-have apps, and then there are you'd-be-crazy-not-to-have-them apps—StuffIt Expander falls into the latter category. This essential utility will open up all those SIT, ZIP, GZ, and other compressed files you downloaded from the Internet.

Worth a Try

Desktop Resetter

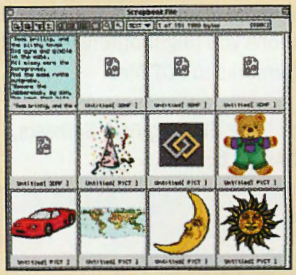
No-U-Turn Software, $10, www.goddfaddasoft.com/resetter

Restore the arrangement of your desktop items when resolution switching moves them.

Scrap-It Pro

John V. Holder, $20, www.northcoast.com/~jvholder

This scrapbook's view and search features put Apple's Scrapbook to shame.



See all your bits and pieces at once in Scrap-It Pro's gallery view.

Synchronize

Qdea, $29.95, www.qdea.com

Automatically back up your data to removable media or iDisks, or sync files with another Mac.

MyBattery

Jeremy Kezer, $10, www.kezer.net/mybattery.html

This utility monitors your laptop's battery much more accurately than Apple's built-in software.

Mt. Everything

Horst Prolow, free, www.overnet.de/hhp/mte

Mount SCSI volumes, inspect disk partitions, and enable drives without rebooting.

iDiskMounter

Christian Vick, suggested fee of $5, www.cooc.de/softies/idiskmounter

Mount iDisk without typing a password, and suppress that annoying time-out message.

Doublet Scan

Hyperbolic Software, $25, www.hyperbolicsoftware.com

Delete space-wasting duplicate files—how many copies of SimpleText do you need?

TransType

FontLab, $49.95, www.fontlab.com/html/transtype.html

Convert TrueType and Type 1 fonts from PC to Macintosh formats—and vice versa.

Joliet Volume Access

Thomas Tempelmann, free (as of press time), www.tempel.org/joliet

Enhance your Mac's ability to read CD-ROMs created for Windows and other platforms.

MacZip

Dirk Haase, free, www.sitec.net/maczip

Expand ZIP-format compressed files—or make your own.

Cast Off

MonkeyBread Software, $10, www.monkeybreadsoftware.com

Remove those unused preferences files cluttering your System Folder.

SaveATree

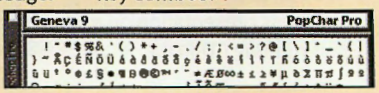
Michael S. Engber, free, download from http://hyperarchive.lcs.mit.edu/HyperArchive/Archive/prn/save-a-tree-154.hqx

Lets you print on one page what would normally occupy two to four—but what you print ends up very, very small.

PopChar Pro

Uni Software Plus, $29, www.unisoft.co.at/products/popchar.html

Choose oddball characters from a pop-up menu rather than typing oddball key combos.



Tildes and umlauts and accents, oh my!

Mac OS X

It has potential to be great, but young Mac OS X still needs these training wheels.

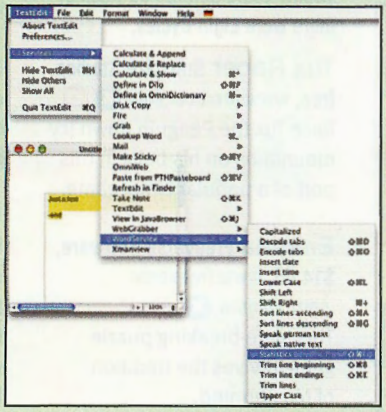
Must-Have

OmniDiskSweeper
The Omni Group, $15, www.omnigroup.com/products/omnidisksweeper

OmniDiskSweeper builds a list of the largest files on your system—the selfish ones that are piggishly taking up all that precious disk space—and allows you to delete any you no longer need. It also tells you which files the operating system requires so you don't accidentally delete essential resources.

WordService
Christian Grunenberg, free, http://home.arcor-online.de/grunenberg

WordService adds features for working with text to all Cocoa-created applications. Its abundant skills include sorting, changing case, statistics, encoding and decoding tabs, shifting text position, and inserting the date or time. It's a time-saver.



WordService adds text-manipulation functions to any OS X app.

The Moose's Apprentice
WünderMoösen, $15, www.wundermoosen.com/wmTMA.htm

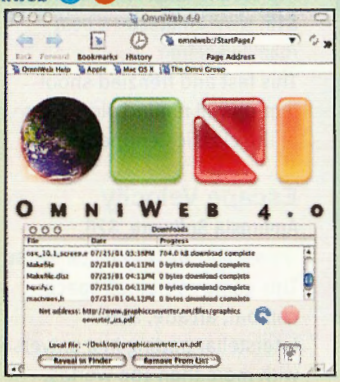
Edit, monitor, and restore Unix configuration files with this program's friendly graphical interface—and without a degree in Unix system administration. If the changes don't work properly, The Moose's Apprentice will let you revert to a previous version of your configuration files. The program also monitors the state of config files and will warn you if a cracker surreptitiously tweaks them.

X-Assist
Peter Li, free, http://members.ozemail.com.au/~pli/x-assist

You upgraded to Mac OS X, but you miss your favorite features from the classic Mac OS you've known and loved for years. X-Assist feels your pain—and can do something about it. This program adds an application switcher to the menu bar, provides a Control Strip–like plug-in architecture, and lets you add personal hierarchies of items to a Mac OS 9–style Apple menu. Thomas Wolfe was wrong—you *can* go home again.

OmniWeb
The Omni Group, $29.95, www.omnigroup.com/products/omniweb

OmniWeb is a beautiful, polished Web browser designed exclusively for Mac OS X. The spiffy interface includes customizable toolbars and drawers for bookmarks and site history. Even the dreaded smoothed-whether-you-like-it-or-not text looks way better than Internet Explorer's.



Appearing exclusively on Mac OS X—it's OmniWeb!

Worth a Try

Calindock
Critical Matter, free, www.criticalmatter.com

Add a monthly calendar to your Dock—it's simple, clean, and useful.

AutoCompleter
Catchy Software, $15, www.catchysoftware.com/autocompleter

This clever utility speeds your typing by autocompleting words in any Cocoa application.

Unsupported UtilityX
Ryan Rempel, free, http://eshop.macsales.com/OSXCenter/framework.cfm?page=UnsupportedUtilityX.html

Old Mac? Won't run X? Maybe you can change that with this sneaky installer.

Space.dock
Riley Lynch, free, http://space.sourceforge.net

Create virtual workspaces that expand your screen real estate.

Cheaper than a new monitor.

X Sounds
free, http://montgomery.cas.muohio.edu/SSAUER

Spice up your OS X auditory experience with this bundle of 675 AIFF-format sounds.

Fire
epicware, free, www.epicware.com/fire.html

This instant messaging client works with six chat services, including AOL, Yahoo, and IRC.

Firewalk X
Mike Vannorsdel, $12, www.users.qwest.net/~mvannorsdel/firewalkx

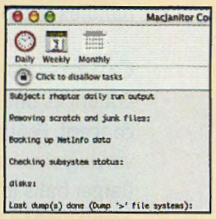
Use a graphical interface to configure and maintain OS X's built-in firewall.

ManThor
Stefan Lange-Hegermann, free, www.blackmac.de/manthor

Get easy access to Unix's built-in explanatory manual pages.

MacJanitor
Brian Hill, free, http://personalpages.tds.net/~brian_hill/macjanitor.html

Do you turn off your system at night? Make OS X do its nightly maintenance tasks, such as deleting old log files, during the day.



Now Mac OS X can do its nighttime dirty work any time.

Alarm Clock Pro
Koingo Software, $9.97, www.koingosw.com/products/alarm_clock_pro.shtml

Set up to five alarms, and even wake up to your favorite CD or MP3 tune.

RBrowser
Object Warehouse, free, www.rbrowser.com

View and edit files on your Mac and remote Unix systems using one interface.

Sharity
Objective Development, $59, www.obdev.at/products/sharity

Connect to Windows, Samba, AppleShare IP, and other popular file servers.

Launcher
Brian Hill, $15, http://personalpages.tds.net/~brian_hill/launcher.html

A self-proclaimed shameless rip-off of the Launcher control panel in System 7 and Mac OS 8.

Classic Dockling
Impulse Development, free, www.impulsedev.com

Start, stop, and monitor the Classic environment from the Dock.

TinkerTool
Marcel Bresink Software-Systeme, free, www.bresink.de/osx/TinkerTool.html

Customize your Mac with TinkerTool by activating hidden options Apple doesn't want you to find, including a desktop trash can and a font-smoothing control.

Games

Got time to waste? These gems are guaranteed to reduce your productivity.

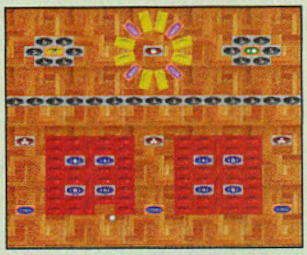
Must-Have

Tranquility **TQworld, $24 per year, http://tqworld.com**

Come for the fascinating graphics, stay for the engaging puzzles. In Tranquility, you float through colorful 3D space looking for a spinner that will transport you to the next level. The game customizes challenges depending on your playing style. Tranquility requires an Internet connection while you play because the game's online server handles personalized levels and scoring.

Colibricks **Michel Colman, $16, http://nav.to/colibricks**

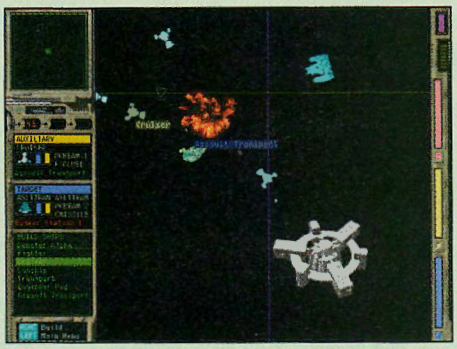
Colibricks offers a unique slant on the old ball-and-bricks gaming concept. Features include balls of varying sizes and true-to-life physics (larger balls are heavier). Bricks aren't limited to horizontal orientation—you'll see them arranged in arches, spirals, and plenty of other intriguing patterns.



Colibricks is like Breakout, only more fun.

Ares **Ambrosia Software, $25, www.ambrosiasw.com/games/ares**

Interstellar combat is the game in Ares, a strategic war simulation. Use your ships to control and protect planets against a computer or human opponent. The game's not easy, so start with the tutorial levels to learn controls and basic tactics.



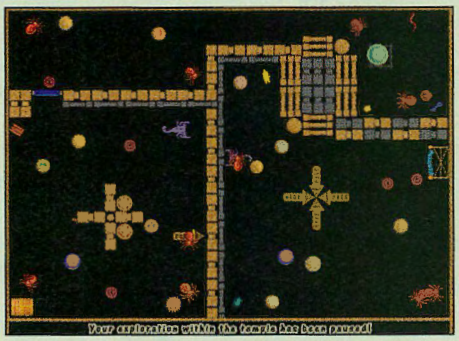
Play war games in deep space.

MacMAME **free, www.macmame.org**

Play thousands of classic arcade games such as Defender, Mr. Do, and Out Run with this versatile emulator, accurate down to the last detail. The program is free, but you need to download game ROMs to use with it (available at www.mame.dk and www.retrogames.com, among other places). Those ROMs are copyrighted, so don't download any if you plan on running for an elected office.

Temple Tantrum **Ground Zero Software, $18, www.templetantrum.com**

If there's a bit of Indiana Jones in you, you need Temple Tantrum. Search more than 100 levels for treasure in this arcade-type exploration game. If you manage to make it through those levels, the level editor lets you build your own.



Grab the goodies while avoiding vile beasties.

Worth a Try

GlTron **Andreas Umbach, free, www.gltron.org**

Zoom around a 3D landscape in this modern interpretation of an eighties classic.

Twenty years before Pod Racing, there were Light Cycles.

Tux Racer **Sunspire Studios, free, www.tuxracer.com**

Race Tux the Penguin down icy mountains on his belly in this port of a popular Linux game.

Enigma **Freeverse Software, $14.95, www.freeverse.com/enigma**

This code-breaking puzzle game revives the tradition of Mastermind.

Pac the Man **McSebi, free, www.mcsebi.de**

A trademark-infringement lawsuit waiting to happen, Pac the Man is a 25-level Pac-Man clone.

Bushfire **Strange Flavour, $3, www.strangeflavour.com**

Fly your helicopter through the forest and extinguish fires in this 2D scrolling game.

MacSolitaire **PCV enr, free, www.pcv-soft.com**

Play that classic time-waster, Solitaire, in this popular freeware adaptation.

Apeiron **Ambrosia Software, $15, www.ambrosiasw.com/games/apeiron**

This fast and frenzied shoot-'em-up will remind old-timers of the classic Centipede.

Escape Velocity **Ambrosia Software, $20, www.ambrosiasw.com/games/ev**

This game combines space combat, arcade, and interstellar trading in a universe with more than 100 worlds.

TheCowCatchingGame **Martin Wengenmayer, $10, http://homepage.mac.com/mwengenm**

Use your flying saucer to catch as many cows as you can in this OS X–only game.

Sigma Chess Lite **Ole Kjaer Christensen, free, www.sigmachess.com/_download/download.html**

How about a nice game of chess? This game offers challenging play and graphics plug-ins.

MacFIBS **Paul D. Ferguson, $20 ($10 for those age 65 or older), www.fibs.com/macfibs**

Play backgammon with thousands of online opponents via the First Internet Backgammon Server.

Domitrix **APO Games, $10, www.kagi.com/apo**

Link falling dominos in this addictive Tetris-like puzzle game.

Weird Al's Great Adventure **FIDIM Interactive, free public beta, www.fidim.com/fidim/waga.html**

Help Weird Al Yankovic find his accordion and avoid the slime creature and the radioactive hamster.

Nanosaur **Pangea Software, $15, www.pangeasoft.net/nano**

As a dinosaur, you run, shoot, and collect eggs to ensure the future of your species.

Reckless Drivin' **Jonas Echterhoff, $12, reckless.x2.nu**

Drive through 2D levels and leave as much destruction in your wake as possible.

Get your kicks on Route 66.

Customization

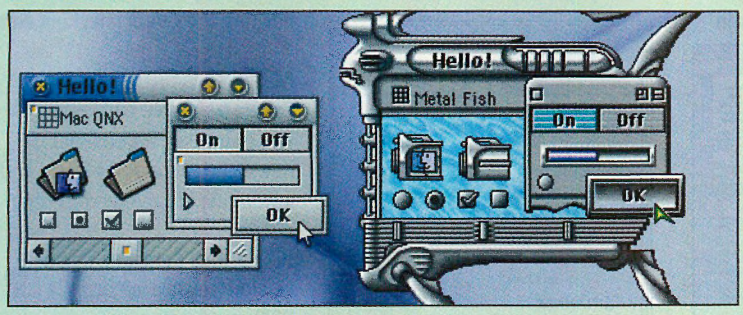
It's your Mac—it should look, sound, and perform just the way you want it to.

Must-Have

Kaleidoscope

Greg Landweber and Arlo Rose, $20, www.kaleidoscope.net

Choose from a mammoth variety of schemes—plug-in modules that can change your Mac's interface with chameleonlike ease. You can enjoy nonrectangular windows, cool transparency effects, and other whiz-bang interface tricks.



Give your Mac a makeover with Kaleidoscope.

USB Overdrive

Alessandro Levi Montalcini, $20, www.usboverdrive.com

Customize the behavior of the buttons, wheels, and switches on your USB mice, trackballs, joysticks, and gamepads with USB Overdrive. Overdrive allows you to use any input device with any game, assign different behaviors to each button, and enable document scrolling if your device has a scroll wheel.

DragThing

James Thomson, $25, www.dragthing.com

DragThing adds a flexible dock to your desktop, handy for launching applications, opening folders, and jumping to Web pages. Each colorful dock can hold any number of tabbed pages. For easy access to a program, document, or folder, just drag it onto an empty space in the dock.

DragThing adds a handy dock to your Mac OS X or pre–OS X desktop.

Worth a Try

Sound Shuffler

No U-Turn Software, free, www.goddfaddasoft.com/shuffler

Randomize your Mac's alert beep to add spice to the most frustrating error messages.

FinderPop

Turlough O'Connor, $8, www.finderpop.com

Make the contextual menu a program launcher, window-switching menu, and application switcher.

AliasMenu

Benoît Widemann, $25, www.widemann.net/aliasmenu-us.html

Add cute little icons to the menu bar for quick access to all of your apps.

Default Folder

St. Clair Software, $25, www.stclairsoft.com/DefaultFolder

Set default save folders for each app and switch quickly between favorite doc folders.

Sleeper

St. Clair Software, $25, www.stclairsoft.com/Sleeper

Fine-tune disk spin-down, monitor, and system-sleep settings—even on older Macs.

Icon Tools

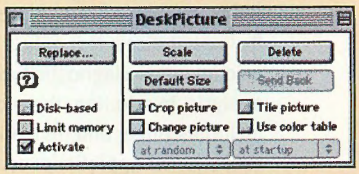
Riccisoft, $15, www.riccisoft.com/icontools

Create cool, customized desktop icons with Icon Tools—even if you don't have any artistic talent.

DeskPicture

Peirce Software, $20, www.peircesw.com/DeskPicture.html

Change your desktop image randomly or at set intervals.



It's time to get serious about your desktop pictures.

Math and Science

Mac users can also be scholars. Some of them, anyway.

Must-Have

Earth Browser

Lunar Software, $19.95, www.earthbrowser.com

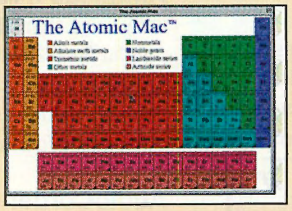
A stunning interactive globe, Earth Browser lets you view real-time cloud conditions and weather patterns, track earthquakes, and monitor volcanoes. See the locations and magnitudes of the latest significant earthquakes and volcanic activity worldwide. Click a volcano to see pictures and information about it. As a bonus, the Webcam tool makes it easy to see live images of your favorite spots.

Worth a Try

The Atomic Mac

Black Cat Systems, $25, www.blackcatsystems.com/software/atomic.html

This periodic-table app serves up a graphical table, a molecular-weight calculator, and more.



If you don't know your noble gases from your alkali metals, you need The Atomic Mac.

OzTeX

Andrew Trevorrow, $30, www.trevorrow.com/oztex

This Mac implementation of the TeX typesetting system excels at math typesetting.

iUnit

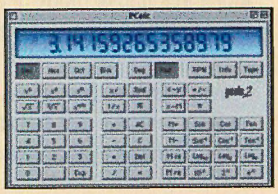
Black Cat Systems, $20, www.blackcatsystems.com/software/iunit.html

Convert 550 different units of measurement. How many millimeters in a parsec? 30,856,800,000,000,000,000. But you knew that already, didn't you?

PCalc 2.1

TLA Systems, $10, www.pcalc.com

Upgrade your calculator to PCalc, a beautiful and oh-so-functional calc tool.



PCalc is prettier and has more functionality than Apple's ancient Calculator, don't ya think?

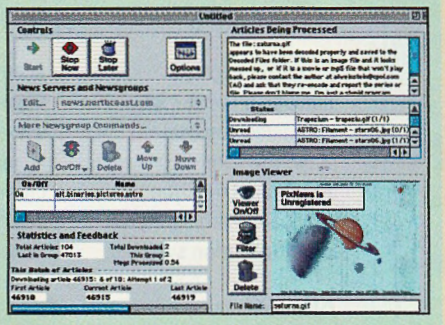
Internet

There's more to the Internet than just the Web—these gems will help you master all its powers.

Must-Have

PixMachine Techsono Engineering, $40, www.techsono.com/pixmachinemac

Grab images, movies, and MP3s from Usenet automatically. Just plug in your favorite newsgroups (binary groups work best), and PixMachine will download all the graphics and movies it can find, piece them together, and create a nice index. Let it run while you sleep and you'll wake up to a bounty of multimedia goodness in the morning. The product includes PixPlayer for viewing and managing pictures and movies.



Aha! PixMachine finds rare nonpornographic pictures on Usenet.

iVisit Eyematic Interface, free, www.ivisit.com/download.htm

It's the videophone of the future—on your Mac today. iVisit allows you to chat with old friends or meet new people, chat room style. If you have a video camera, you can let others see your pretty face—if not, paste in a still picture. A fast Internet connection helps but isn't mandatory.

Interarchy Interarchy User Group, $35, www.interarchy.com

It slices, it dices! Not only is Interarchy a faboo FTP client, but it also includes diagnostic tools like ping, traceroute, and IP packet analysis. In addition, the program provides server functions including finger and network time protocol, and it allows remote execution of AppleScript commands via telnet.

Outlook Express Microsoft, free, www.microsoft.com/mac

We hear your cries of protest. Love Microsoft or hate it, you've gotta love the guys and gals at Microsoft's Macintosh Business Unit—they create some great software. Outlook Express is a fantastic, fast, full-featured email client—and the price is right.

Worth a Try

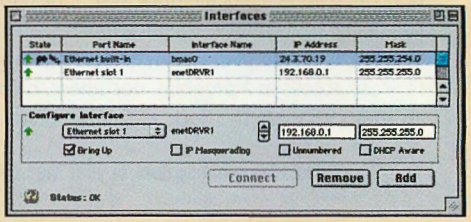
URL Manager Pro Alco Blom, $25, www.url-manager.com

Arrange URLs, FTP sites, and email addresses, then access them from all of your Internet clients.

URL Manager Pro lets you organize bookmarks and share them between browsers.

IPNetRouter Sustainable Softworks, $89, www.sustworks.com

Share your Mac's Internet connection with other computers on your LAN—even those evil PCs.



If your Mac has two Ethernet ports, IPNetRouter can secure your Mac and all the other computers on your LAN.

NiftyTelnet SSH Jonas Walldén, free, www.lysator.liu.se/~jonasw/freeware/niftyssh

This telnet app supports secure shell (SSH) sessions, perfect for hacking the CIA or checking email.

MT-NewsWatcher Simon Fraser, free, www.smfr.org/mtnw

The quintessential Usenet newsreader supports filters and automatic binary-file decoding.

iCab iCab Company, free beta version (release version will cost $29), www.icab.de

This sleek, bloat-free browser is a great substitute for corpulent corporate ones.

ICQ ICQ, free, www.icq.com

Enjoy real-time chat, exchange files, and send SMS (Short Messages System) messages to cell-phone users.

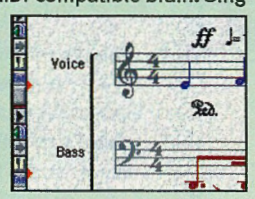
Audio

So you're not P. Diddy—you and your Mac can still jam, mix, dub, and sample.

Must-Have

Melody Assistant Myriad Software, $15, www.myriad-online.com

We know you're eager to put the finishing touches on that epic rock opera. You need Melody Assistant, which provides a score editor and printer, a digital sound editor, and other gadgets for your MIDI-compatible brain. Sing along in Karaoke mode or let your Mac do the singing.



Transcribe your favorite tune or write your own with Melody Assistant's score editor.

Worth a Try

Amadeus II Martin Hairer, $25, www.unige.ch/math/folks/hairer/martin/Amad2.html

Create, manipulate, and analyze sounds. Includes support for MP3 and other audio formats.

AudioCorder Black Cat Systems, $20, www.blackcatsystems.com/software/audiocorder.html

This voice-activated recorder can schedule recording sessions, like a VCR, and record phone calls.

Authentic Sound Recorder InnerLoop Productions, $29.95, www.innerloop-prod.com/AS_Recorder.html

Record four direct-to-digital tracks, then mix them and save it all in AIFF format.

Mboom MeepMeep, $99, www.mboom.com

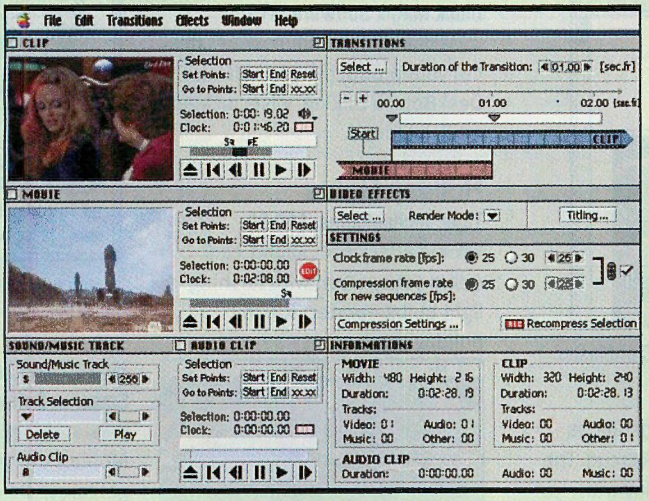
This sequencer supports both loop-style and timeline-based song arranging.

Video
Haven't bought a digital-video camera yet? Look at what you're missing.

Must-Have

QuickTime Pro Apple, $29.99, www.apple.com/quicktime/download
Apple's QuickTime Pro is probably the most essential application in any video maker's arsenal. With it, you can edit movies, add special effects and sound effects, create Internet-ready audio and video, and even build 360-degree virtual-reality scenes. For more info on what you can do with QuickTime, see "20 QuickTime Tricks," Sep/01, p30.

QuickEditor Mathias Tschopp, $35, www.wild.ch/quickeditor
QuickEditor is a powerful QuickTime movie editor that includes titling, transitions, video effects, and sequence-grabbing tools. Digitize your movie (any video source will do, including a USB video camera), then put your masterpiece together. Choose from more than 100 filters and scene-transition effects, then add titles and a soundtrack.



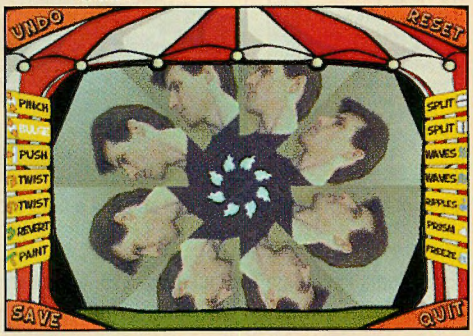
Edit movies like a pro with QuickEditor.

Worth a Try

VideoScope Evological, $30,
www.evological.com/videoscope.html
Perform real-time luminance and chrominance analysis for any video source.

MacVCD Mireth Technology, $10,
www.mireth.com/macvcd.html
You don't need a DVD-ROM drive to play Video CDs on your Mac—you just need this player.

VideoFunhouse Chaotic Software, $24.95,
www.chaoticsoftware.com
Twist, bulge, and squeeze a live video image for endless giggles.

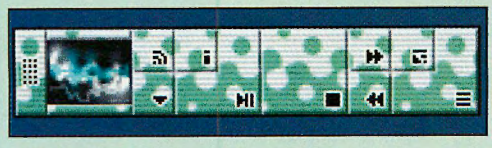


Create wild video effects with VideoFunhouse.

MP3
The International Corporate Conspiracy may have silenced Napster, but MP3 rocks on.

Must-Have

Mint Audio Unsanity, $13,
http://mint.unsanity.com
This clever MP3 player won't tax your Mac or clutter your desktop. The unobtrusive and collapsible interface sticks to the side of the screen, Control Strip fashion. Despite its small size, the program offers heavyweight features, including support for 30 audio formats, Internet streams, cross-fading, and skins.



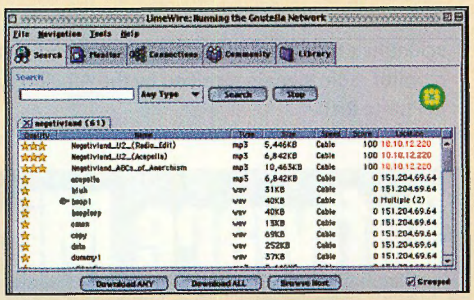
Mint Audio proves that size doesn't matter.

iTunes Apple, free, www.apple.com/itunes
Rip MP3s from CDs, search your entire music collection, and burn your own audio discs with this freebie from Apple. Or set off the psychedelic visualizer in a dark room for hours of mindless, drug-free entertainment.

Worth a Try

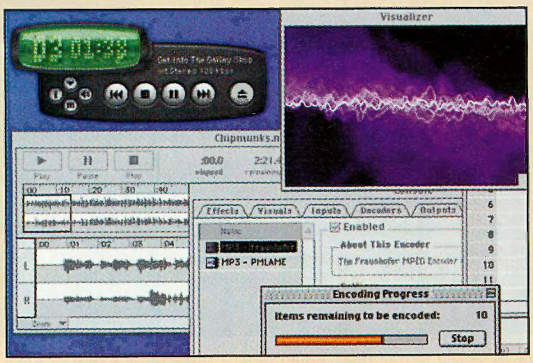
LimeWire Lime Wire, free,
www.limewire.com
Search the peer-to-peer Gnutella network for MP3s—plus many other kinds of files.

Macast @soft, $24.95,
www.macast.com
In addition to MP3s, Macast can play Shoutcast and Icecast streams and audio CDs. You also can tweak its look with skins.



Grab the goods from the Gnutella network with LimeWire.

Audion
Panic, $19.95 (player only) or $32.95 (player and encoder),
www.panic.com/audion
Play MP3s, CDs, and Internet audio streams. Also includes a sound editor and two encoding engines.



Encode groovy new MP3s with Audion.

Random but Cool

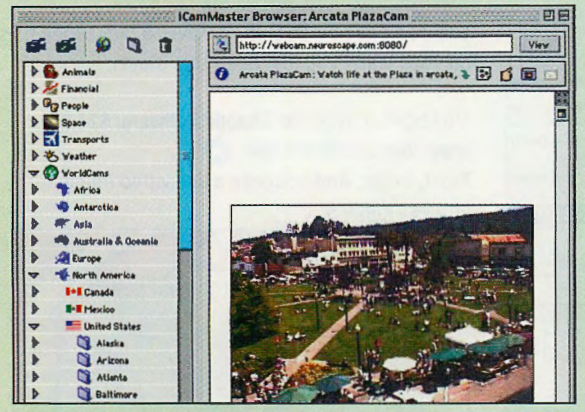
These programs may not be indispensable, but they're too cool to ignore.

Must-Have

iCamMaster

Catalunya Disseny Informatic, $20, www.icammaster.com

This app makes it easy to view Webcams, monitoring thousands of real-time images from around the world. Put your favorite cam on the desktop and iCamMaster will periodically update it, or record a Webcam's output as a QuickTime movie.



If you're stuck in a cubicle, you can step out a little with iCamMaster.

Bernie][The Rescue

F.E. Systems Emulation Technologies, $15, www.bernie.gs/Bernie

Run Apple II software on your Mac with Bernie][the Rescue. The program emulates Apple IIgs hardware, so you can play with classic software like Castle Wolfenstein and Visicalc. You need copies of the IIgs ROM file and system software, which you can download from www.emulation.net/apple2/. Legal? Maybe.

SETI@home

SETI@home, free, http://setiathome.ssl.berkeley.edu

Let your Mac search for signs of extraterrestrial life with SETI@home—it makes a cool screen saver, too. The project is a scientific experiment that uses Internet-connected computers to monitor radio signals received by the Arecibo Radio Observatory in Puerto Rico.

Worth a Try

Clear Skies

Ruedi Schmid, $10, www.stargazersoft.com/clearskies.html

Capture tonight's stars, constellations, and planets, then display them on your desktop.

DeskBots

Black Magik Software, $15, www.blackmagik.com/deskbots.html

Cut your productivity in half with DeskBots, a talking, wisecracking artificial friend.

Holiday Lights

Tiger Technologies, $19.95, www.tigertech.com/hlights.html

Adorn your screen with flashing light bulbs—perfect for any holiday season.

Your neighbors won't complain if you leave these Holiday Lights up until May.

Window Monkey

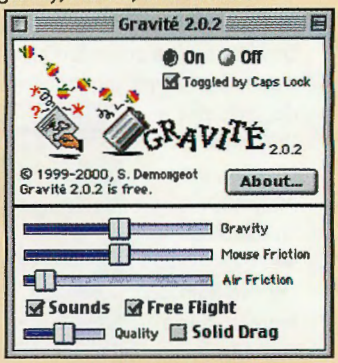
Tiger Technologies, $19.95, www.tigertech.com/monkey.html

Add background patterns, pictures, or textures to any window in the Finder.

Gravité

Sylvain Demongeot, free, www.wildbits.com/gravite

Make objects you drag (such as Finder icons) obey the laws of gravity, inertia, and friction.



Watch out for falling icons when you have Gravité.

WeatherCenter

Smashin Software, $10, www.smashin.com/WC

Monitor the current weather and get forecasts with this simple, customizable program.

MyEyes

Factor Software, $10, www.factor-software.com/myeyes.html

Put this pair of customizable eyes in your menu bar—they'll follow your cursor's every move.

Ever feel like you're being watched?

Software Mining Made Simple

Before you go digging around the Web for the shareware and freeware apps we recommend here, check out this month's Disc—*MacAddict*'s redoubtable Dr. Droo has stuffed it with well over 100 of 'em. To find the rest, check out some of our favorite Web sources, listed here.

Info-Mac HyperArchive
Although its text-only interface may look like it dates way back to 1994—which, in fact, it does—don't let lackluster looks fool you. Info-Mac is one of the Internet's largest collections of Mac downloads.
http://hyperarchive.lcs.mit.edu/HyperArchive.html

VersionTracker
Gawd, we love this site. In addition to offering days worth of downloads, VersionTracker keeps you up to date on all the latest and greatest software, tells you what's new in each version, and offers user reviews.
www.versiontracker.com

Download.com
Download.com offers links to the week's newest and most popular software. The weekly e-newsletter provides info on new software and upgrades.
http://download.cnet.com

MacUpdate
In addition to a heap of apps and games for Mac OS 9 and earlier, MacUpdate includes an OS X section, email notifications of updated software, and a daily list of new releases.
www.macupdate.com

The Mother Ship
Want to know what the Cupertino Fruit Company regards as the best in Mac OS X shareware, freeware, updates, and demos? Apple's Mac OS X Downloads site offers the cream of the crop—from the tree's point of view.
www.apple.com/downloads/macosx

Kevin Savetz has written about the Mac since 1992, and he's been a shareware junkie for a lot longer. In the spirit of shareware, if you enjoyed this article, send him a dollar.